

## **A Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Native Kansan, Dr. Edward Williams**

January 15, 2007

By gathering today to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we teach important lessons to the next generation of Americans. Our children must realize how difficult the struggle for racial justice in our society has been. We need them to understand that making a positive difference with one's life sometimes involves sacrifice. And we need our children to know that a person of conscience and purpose can touch and lift up many lives.

Dr. Edward Williams, a native of Ellsworth, Kansas, was such a person. Dr. Williams, who in 1941 was the first African American to graduate from the University of Kansas School of Medicine, recently died at the age of 94 in Muskegon, Michigan. Upon graduating as valedictorian of Ellsworth High School, Edward attended KU and in 1936 was admitted to medical school. At that time, black medical students were forced to transfer after two years of study because of concerns about black students examining white patients. Edward's academic accomplishments and desire to succeed convinced Governor Walter Huxman and the Kansas Board of Regents to end this unjust segregation policy. Following military service, Edward settled in Muskegon where over the course of 40 years he became a talented and highly respected physician.

Dr. King, in a speech delivered 47 years ago, could have been describing the positive impact of Edward's life:

“Whatever career you may choose for yourself--doctor, lawyer, teacher--let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights. Make it a central part of your life. It will make you a better doctor, a better lawyer, a better teacher. It will enrich your spirit as nothing else possibly can. It will give you that rare sense of nobility that can only spring from love and selflessly helping your fellow man. Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.”

Edward Williams followed Dr. King's advice. Our state and nation are better because of it.